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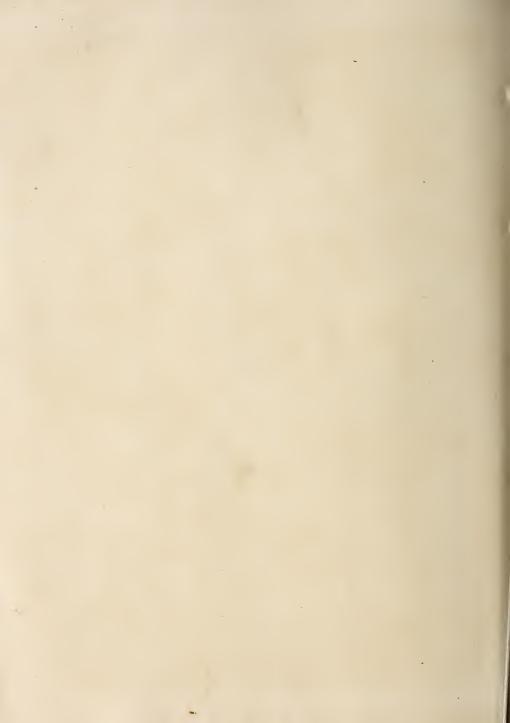
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HUMANITY

A VISION — A REALITY

A POEM

 $\mathbf{B}\mathbf{Y}$

WM. TOD HELMUTH

NEW YORK

E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY

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1887





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A VISION.

'Twas eve in Pisa: The lovely haze of an Italian sky—

Known to no other clime — was dropping soft

Upon the distant hills, whose purple crests Rose clearly on the azure

horizon;

And from the summit of the Campanile —

Which 'ever leans defiant of the law

That holds the planets in their devious course —

The heavy and harmonious bells rang out





The compline call.

Over the Baptistry,
The full-orb'd moon,
with silvery halo
bright,

The dome and figure of St. John bedeck'd.

A balmy air was wafted from the sea,

Stirring the soil from far Jerusalem,

Which round the moonlit Campo Santo lay,*
As, with a heart on contemplation bent,
I entered the Duomo and sat down
Beneath Del Sarto's picture of St. Agnes,
Whose face, angelic in its purity,
In peaceful adoration seems to rest.

^{*}In the year 1223 the Pisans brought soil from Jerusalem and placed it around the Campo Santo, that the bodies of distinguished persons might be buried in the sacréd earth.

Above me, from the darkness of the dome, Suspended still there hung the lamp of bronze,

Which to the mind of Galileo taught

The measurement of time; and as the youth,*

Whose heart triumphant then was throbbing loud,

His finger on his beating pulses laid,

He found the index to the health of man.

Then, as the incense-bearing air in wreaths

Was borne aloft into the vaulted roof,

The red-robed cardinals in reverence bent

Before the altar high, while solemn chaunt

Resounded sweet through arch and architrave.



^{*}Galileo was but eighteen years old when he discovered the rhythm of the pulse.



A vision fair insensibly did steal
Over my senses in that holy place,
And, as the pendulum swung
on, there came

A soft sweet music with a rushing wind,

And lo! St. Luke, the lov'd physician, rose

Stretching his hands aloft o'er all the earth,

Breathing a blessing and a prayer for those Who to the suffering and the sick devote The tenure of their lives.

Then, as the strains,

Reëchoing, died within the sacred arch, In voice harmonious to my list'ning ear The great Recorder of the Gospel spake:—

- "'Tis not the sounding word or brazen tone,
- "Or knowledge deep and vast as boundless seas;
- "Or keen intelligence which ever looks
- "Into the motives of which acts are born;
- "Nor gold which proselytes the world and buys
- "Men's hearts and souls, fooling the gaping crowd,
- "By cloaking ignorance or gilding sin;
- "Nor is it yet the skilful hand that opes
- "The sacred cavities of thought and life
- "In nature's citadel, defies disease,
- "And rears a bulwark 'gainst advancing death, —

- "'Tis not all these, or yet the occult lore
- "Of root and mineral and herb that make
- "The *true* physician. One or all may raise
- "His name in worldly estimation high,
- "And, trumpet-like, proclaim him as a God
- "Around the circle of his habitat;—
- "And men may call him great and women bow
- "E'en at the mention of his very name.



"But here 'mong saints and heav'nly hosts, who look

"Beyond the flimsy veil appearance casts

"Over the action of each mortal man,

"The first, great, grand absorbing attribute

"Of him who tends the suffering of his race,

"Must be that large *Humanity*, which holds

"Within itself enduring faith and love,—

- "Humanity, which recks not of itself,
- "And from whose soil indigenous there springs
- "Sweet charity for every fellow-man;
- "Humanity which all resplendent shone,
- "Throughout the pathway of the Son of God,
- "Who at the marriage feast of Cana turned
- "The water into wine, and wept aloud
- "Beside the grave of Lazarus dead, and who,

"With pitying voice and mild, forgiving eyes,

"Forgave her taken in th' adult'rous act

"When, conscience-stricken, her accusers fled."
Starting I woke; the organ strain had ceased;
The glimmering taper to the Virgin burned
Before the shrine, and stillness reign'd supreme.



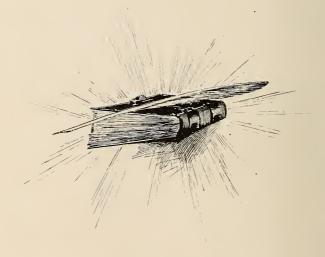
With echoing footsteps through the arches dark Into the open night I passed. The stars Looked down upon the city sleeping there Beneath the moonlit sky. And as I stood Upon the lighted bridge which Arno spans, The faint halloo across the water borne, Or echoing row-locks from revolving oars, Proclaimed belated boatman on the stream.

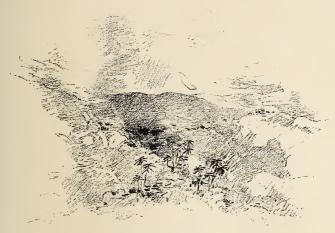


That night till dawn all sleep forsook mine eyes, And on the vision I had seen, my thoughts Revolving rapidly, each other chased. Abou Ben Adhem's dream, in which the name Of him who loved his fellow-men receiv'd The place of honor in th' celestial courts, Haunted my restless fancy, and I thought How many noble hearts and mighty men Have fought unceasingly with human woe, Have braved the pestilence and faced the scourge, And when contagion, with its loathsome grasp, Has filled a city's streets with piled up dead, Rearing one vast, disgusting charnel-house, — Have with unflinching zeal their duty done, Rendering their lives a sacrifice for men, Remaining yet unhonored and unknown.



And then a simple, touching incident Unfolding faith, humanity, and love, Self-sacrifice and death before me rose, And 'tis recorded here in that it bears Upon the vision I had lately seen.





REALITY.

The battle's heat was over,

The bloody fight was won,

And on the dead and dying

Shone out the Christmas sun.—

A Christmas in the tropics,

So warm, and bright, and fair,

Had been a day of bloodshed,

Of triumph and despair.

Afar Majuba's mountain

Rose clear athwart the sky

While wreathing smoke of cannon

On every peak did lie.

Far up the shadow'd valley
Along the fertile plain,
The sites of fearful carnage
Were marked with heaps of
slain.

While here and there a soldier
Wrought painfully for breath,
And sturdy men and stubborn
Fought hand to hand with death.
Oft comrade bent o'er comrade,
The living 'mong the dead,
To catch a fleeting whisper,
Ere soul from body sped;



And bronz'd and scarréd veterans,
Who faced both shot and shell
The morning of the conflict,
Were lying as they fell:
Some grasping hard the musket,
Some clutching at the air;
With features set in agony
Or stony in despair.



Amid a heap of wounded,

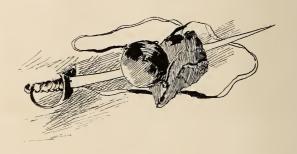
The surgeon of his corps,

With shattered limbs, was lying
Unheeded in his gore.

All day amid the battle,

'Mid shot and bursting shells,

Amid the groans of wounded,
Or loud, triumphant yells,
Courageous in his duty,
Calm in his sense of right,
Amid the crash of cannon
And thunder of the fight,
He gave the wounded comfort,
To suffering men his aid,
On many a gash of sabre



His gentle hand was laid.

His presence cast a halo
O'er ambulance and tent,
And voice and eye spoke blessings
Wherever Langdon went;
Till, bending at his duty,
The foremost in the line,
A murderous missile, straying,
Went crushing through his spine.



And lo! beside the surgeon
A wounded soldier lay,
Whose record had been glorious
Throughout the live-long day.
A ghastly wound, and bleeding,
Gaped open on his thigh,
Its agony evoking
One long, low, wailing cry.



As moaning winds in autumn
It fell on Langdon's ear,
Till, growing strong and stronger,
Still clearer and more clear,
He roused himself from stupor,
And turned his languid eyes,
To find from whence proceeded
Such agonizing cries.
They rested on the soldier,—
The features well he knew,—
And in a startled whisper
Cried, "Donald, is it you?"



They had been boys together;
In manhood came a strife,
Which deadly feud engendered,
Embittering each life.
And now beside each other,
Both racked with fearsome pain,
The soldier and the surgeon
Met face to face again.



"I wronged you, foully wronged you,"
The soldier faintly said,

"But she who sowed the discord

"Disgraced my home, and fled.

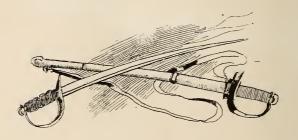
"But, oh!" (He writhed in agony.)

"I told the blackening lie;

"But, Langdon, dear, forgive me,—

"Shake hands before we die." His arm he stretched out feebly,

The space was far too wide, He swooned, — and for a moment Then ebb'd the crimson tide.

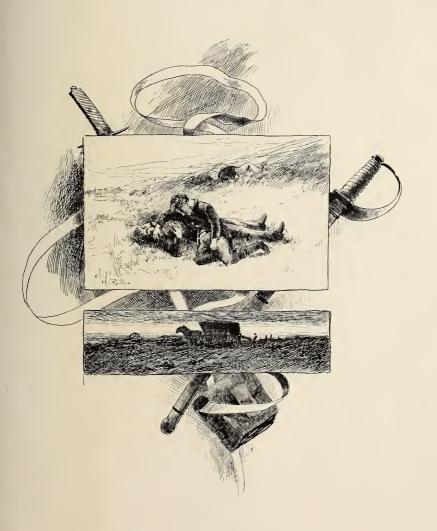


The light of life rekindled
In Langdon's dying gaze,
And o'er his face stole sweetly
The light of other days.
Then rising on his elbow,
With superhuman might
He beckoned to a sergeant
Then coming into sight.
"Come comrade" said he faintly

- "Come, comrade," said he faintly,—
 - "Come, drag me there to him,
- "And wipe my sweating forehead,
 - "My eyes seem growing dim.
- "Yon haversack lies open,
 - "Look there, beside my flask,
- "A leathern case, oh, hasten!
 - "God strengthen for the task.
- "I know that I am dying,
 - "But still my hand is strong,
- "So, let me rest against your breast;
 - "It will not take me long."

The damp of death was falling
On Langdon's pallid face,
While with his trembling fingers
He opened wide the case,
Then with a smile of triumph
He took the polished blade,
And with a skill unerring
The bleeding point displayed,
And, while his life was ebbing,
The spouting vessel tied.
"Good-bye!" he said, and sinking
On Donald's shoulder—died.





The Christmas stars were burning
Bright in the vault above,
When Donald's life returning
He recognized the love,
That thus in death forgave him,
As Christ upon the tree,
Displayed the last example,
Of his humanity.









